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ABSTRACT

The California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, responsible for teacher certification and approval of programs of teacher education, is conducting a major research effort to identify teaching behaviors that are related to student learning of reading and mathematics in the elementary grades: The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study. While the results will not indicate which specific policy alternatives should be adopted, they will have, and already have had, an impact on the thoughts and actions of the members of the policy making body. Policy makers have modified their conceptions of teaching and teacher education; learned about the research process and used research to answer other questions; used results in their individual work; and heard the results quoted by individuals arguing for specific policy decisions. In addition, those subject to the regulations of the Commission have become more aware of and concerned with the results of research on teaching. Specific examples are discussed to elaborate each of these uses of the research results. (Author/GDC)

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Utilization of Research by a Policy Making Regulatory Agency: A Case Study*

Marjorie Powell

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The California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing is a small, relatively new agency, established in 1970 by legislation which removed the teacher credential function from the Department of Education. The Commission is composed of fifteen voting members, appointed by the Governor within categories specified by the law. In addition, five ex-officio members represent various state education agencies, such as the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The first task for the Commission was the promulgating of standards for teacher certification and education. In making these decisions, the policy makers sought evidence to support the inclusion of any specific teaching skills within the standards. While many individuals and groups advocated inclusion of a variety of specific skills, arguments for the inclusion of each skill were based on beliefs, tradition, and past experience. The involved policy makers, recognizing the advocacy based on belief, were also interested in empirical support from social science research.

This belief in research and the applicability of research findings to public policy resulted in the Commission becoming involved in a major research effort, extending over several years and phases, the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES). Funded by the National Institute of Education, the research is aimed at identifying teaching behaviors or

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skills which are related to student learning of reading and mathematics in the elementary grades.[1] Information from the research is potentially relevant to questions of standards for teacher certification and thereby to standards for teacher education. However, just as any multi-year research effort is complex, so too is the relationship of this research effort to the Commission's process of making policy. In describing that complex relationship, some things may be learned about the uses of social science research in making public policy.

When policy makers are willing to face the several risks involved in becoming involved in a research effort, such as the risk of research results which are contradictory to the values and beliefs of the policy makers, they must also struggle with questions about how the results will be used. There is a common belief that the results of research can be used directly in making policy decisions, that the research results translate easily into the "correct" policy decision. However, such an easy solution is not the case, for a number of reasons.

One reason is inherent in the nature of research results; the findings are not clear-cut and conclusive. There are limitations to any one research effort. The results do not generalize to all possible situations. The findings are also apt to be specific to the issue under study while policy decisions are much broader in nature.

Thus, a research conclusion about the correlation between a teaching skill and a measure of student learning is specific but policy makers in the field of teacher education and certification are faced with general decisions such as the nature and duration of student teaching and the relative merit of a number of potential objectives for programs of teacher education.[2]

The BTES, focusing as it does on basic aspects of the relationship between behaviors and skills of teachers and learning of students, is at least one step removed from the decisions in which Commissioners are involved. Those decisions relate to administrative concerns about the process of operating the system of approval of programs of teacher education and concerns about the establishment of new (i.e., bilingual) or the reconsideration of previously existing (i.e., emergency) credentials. Assuming that the research has identified some important relationship between teacher behaviors and student learning, there is still a need to translate that knowledge into a variety of perspectives of teacher education. Thus, questions might be asked such as, "What level of the skill is necessary for beginning teachers?", "To what extent can individuals be trained to utilize the skill?", "To what extent can individuals, once trained, implement the skill within public school classrooms?", "What teacher education approaches are most successful in assisting individuals both to acquire the skill and to implement the skill within public school classrooms?", "What is the relationship between teacher certification policies at the state level and the effective methods of teacher education for the skill?".

Thus, it becomes apparent that the information from the major research effort will not indicate clear policy decisions, or even be directly related to the types of policy issues with which the members of the Commission struggle on a regular basis. Further, the information obtained from the research effort is not directly related to the types of issues with which the administrative staff of the Commission functions on a regular basis. There is, however, one exception to the previous statement; information from the research effort may be

directly related to the content of some of the guidelines which have been developed and adopted for programs of teacher education within the state. For example, the guidelines identify a number of broad areas which must be included within the objectives of teacher education programs. It may be appropriate to review the broad areas of required objectives in light of the knowledge obtained from the research effort. However, because of the general resistance on the part of the staff to the utilization of the research information, the lack of staff involvement in the implementation of the research effort, and the general lack of correspondence between the research information and the majority of the problems and issues addressed by the staff on a regular basis, there is an apparent unwillingness to consider the research information in any such review of credential guidelines.

Research Results and Policy Decisions

What, then, are the ways in which research results might influence policy decisions?

The policy makers may ignore the research results, may not even consider them, in making decisions. This would occur when the research results are unknown to the policy makers, and to the persons providing information and alternatives to the policy makers.

In other instances, research findings may serve as one source of information in the making of policy. An example of this outcome might be the use in a teacher education program of information about differences in time allocations to content areas across classrooms in making decisions about program content or objectives. Another

example might be a decision by faculty in a teacher education program to have teacher education candidates monitor the engagement of students during their classroom visits prior to student teaching. In these examples the research findings are considered in making one or a series of decisions within teacher education, decisions which, in the aggregate, become policy decisions.

Another example, at the state level, might be a decision to use the research results as one source of information in making revisions in the guidelines for programs of teacher education. Thus, some general objectives for programs of teacher education might be revised, added, or deleted, on the basis of the information from the several years of research.

A third alternative is that the research results will influence the assumptions about the conceptualizations of policy issues. Policy makers involved in this research effort have indicated that these sorts of changes have occurred. "The criterion for the success of the study is, 'Has it made us any wiser in our ability to deliberate about the kinds of decisions we have to make?'".[3] This impact on policy is illustrated by the increasing awareness on the part of the policy makers that the area in which they are making policy is relatively complex. In this instance, the members of the Commission have come to recognize that the task of teaching and the task of teacher education, as well as the content to be covered within a program of teacher education, are involved and complex. Many of the individual Commissioners are aware that there are a number of specific skills which teachers must be able to perform adequately within the classroom, but they also recognize the task of teaching is much more

complex than the performance of a series of isolated separate skills.[4] Thus, one important implication of the involvement of these policy makers in a research effort is the expansion and elaboration of this conception of the profession for which they are charged with regulating the training.

Education of Participants

This expansion of the Commissioners' conception of education is an example of a more general category of outcomes, the education of policy makers and researchers. Through their involvement in research, the policy makers have learned a great deal about the process of conducting research. They have also learned about the limitations of research, the extent to which findings can or can not be generalized, the compromises that must be made in conducting research, the impact of these compromises in limiting the generalizability of the results, and the indirect relationship between research and public policy.

At the same time, members of the research community who have been involved in this research effort have learned through this involvement. Researchers have learned about research in the attempt to explain to non-researchers the need for specific research procedures. They have also learned about the concerns and constraints of public policy makers, including the need to make decisions in public, the need for consideration of multiple perspectives and for the establishment and use of processes that provide for communication with all of the constituents of the policy making body. In addition, researchers have learned about communication problems and needs and have developed some skills in communicating with policy makers.

Other Research Efforts

To the extent that policy makers have learned about and have come to place some trust in research, that has been generalized to other policy making situations. The Commission has completed a study recently of the National Teacher's Examination, use within California as an alternate route for the demonstration of subject matter competency on the part of applicants for teaching credentials. The several parts to the study were designed to provide information about a number of questions related to the Commission's use of the NTE. However, in designing the study and making decisions to commit money to the research effort, members of the Commission recognized that the information from the study will provide only one set of data to be considered in making policy decisions related to the NTE, and will not automatically indicate what policy alternative to adopt.

Another example of the expanded use of research is the evaluation of the process of External Assessment. The Commission has developed and implemented a process of assessment of programs of teacher education by individuals external to, but with an interest in, the programs. Throughout the development and implementation of this system, the Commissioners have requested and considered carefully the results of an evaluation of the system, with specific modifications and improvements made based in part on the evaluation results.

This is not intended to imply that the Commission has wholeheartedly adopted the concept of research and evaluation. The educational portion has not been that successful. In at least one instance, members of the Commission have successfully argued for rejection of evaluation plans on the basis that evaluation was not mandated

and therefore should not be undertaken. However, it is still apparent that members of the Commission have increased in their sophistication about the conducting and use of research and evaluation.

Uses by Individual Members

Members of the Commission have also used the knowledge obtained from their involvement in the research process in their own personal and professional activities beyond their role as members of the Commission. For example, information gained from involvement in BTES has been applied to teacher evaluation activities within local school districts, including information about flexibility of teacher behaviors, varieties of observation systems, and about relationships between specific teaching behaviors and student learning. In other instances, members of the Commission have extended their involvement in BTES to other thinking and writing activities, including areas directly related to the research, such as writing about the field of research on teaching, or related areas, such as the analysis of ways in which research results are evaluated by practitioners and other researchers. In other instances, members of the Commission have become involved in staff development activities utilizing information resulting from, and procedures developed by, BTES.

This use of information generated by the research effort in personal and professional activities by members of the policy making group is an important aspect of the impact of research on public policy making bodies. When policy makers use research information in their own personal and professional activities, they accomplish a number of things: they demonstrate the importance of research information not only in the making of public policy but in other activities;

they have an opportunity to evaluate the information gained from the research in a direct way, through the evaluation of the effectiveness of that information; and they disseminate the information from the research effort in a direct and practical, person-to-person manner that is one of the most effective dissemination strategies.[5]

However, it should be noted that the use and dissemination of research information by individual policy makers is only one portion of the responsibility of the policy making group for dissemination and use of the research information. Unless the policy makers also participate in activities designed to consider the implications of the research for policy and actually consider those implications in making policy decisions, the involvement of the policy making body in the research effort will be less than successful.

Echoes from the Field

One interesting way in which information from the research effort impacts the making of policy is the quoting of the research information in comments and recommendations made by teachers and teacher educators. For example, at the end of one phase of the research activity the researchers concluded that the results, which indicate that effective patterns of teaching behavior differ by grade and subject, also indicate the need for different programs of teacher education for different grade levels. While it is clearly possible to argue about the quality of the research results and the appropriateness of the conclusion based on the results, there have been a number of instances when individuals in the field of teacher education have used that statement of conclusions by one of the research teams to argue for changes in the structure of teacher education and teacher credentials.

The previous examples illustrates an interesting situation which has developed in terms of the Commission's knowledge and use of the information from BTES; the further one gets from the research effort, the greater knowledge and interest in the research one finds. While the Commission has received requests for information from individuals in half a dozen countries, many individuals within the State of California only become aware of the research effort when they attend a conference in another state. An example of reporting of results and discussion of the findings at a national conference is the 1978 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, where at least four of the sessions reported results of the BTES. At a national level there is a greater recognition of the potential implications for teacher certification and teacher education of the research results than there is among some members of the Commission and the Commission staff. To some extent the staff members and Commissions directly involved in the research effort are like the proverbial prophet in his own country, attempting to provide important information which is viewed by the recipients as unimportant.

Impact to those Subject to Public Policy

The BTES was originally intended for the purpose for informing the policy decisions of the Commission. However, the involvement of the Commission in a research project has had a number of unanticipated consequences, including an impact on those individuals and organizations which are subject to the policies of the Commission, specifically teacher educators in the State of California.

The particular nature of this impact upon the individuals and programs has been influenced by the fact that one of the original intentions of the study was evaluation of specific programs of teacher education through the evaluation of graduates of those programs. In fact, the very name of the study, the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, comes from that original purpose of evaluation of graduates of specific programs. While the relationship between the Commission and the teacher educators involved in programs of teacher education subject to regulation by the Commission is very complex, it is apparent that the original Commission intent, to combine a research effort designed to identify important skills with an evaluation effort designed to evaluate graduates of programs and thereby evaluate programs, has had an important influence on the ways that teacher educators in the State of California have reacted to, have used the information resulting from, and are willing to acknowledge use of information resulting from, the research project.

A number of individuals involved in teacher education initially objected very strongly to the Commission's involvement in research. The very fact that a regulatory agency is involved in research which may be used as one source of information in decision making about regulatory activities has lead to increased awareness about research in general on the part of individuals subject to the regulations of that agency. Some number of individuals have followed the progress of BTES simply because they are concerned that the results may be used to mandate specific requirements in teacher education. Other individuals, in addressing the question of whether a regulatory agency should or should not become involved in research,

have turned their attention to research in the field. Thus, one spin-off of the Commission's involvement has been an increased sensitivity to research on teaching among teacher educators within the State of California.

To some extent, the awareness of, acknowledgment of potential value of, and willingness to use information generated by the research effort is a result of the philosophies, professional perspectives, and professional interests of individual teacher educators within the State. This is illustrated by the number of individual reactions around the State, reactions which in essence form a continuum from complete rejection of willingness to use the results of research effort, excluding the group of people who have no knowledge of the Commission's involvement in a research effort.

At one end of the continuum are those individuals who indicate that there is no need for information about what goes on in classrooms, about the relationship between teacher behaviors and student learning, about the behaviors of teachers in teaching situations. A surprising number of individual teacher educators within the State of California take the position that knowledge about teaching and schooling is unimportant to the process of teacher education. In the middle of the continuum are those individuals who feel that the research information is interesting and potentially valuable to researchers but is of limited use for those involved in the education of teachers. At the other end of the continuum are individuals who are interested in the research, who actively seek information about the results, and who acknowledge that the results have implications and use within programs of teacher education.

There is also the interesting anomaly that the results of research on teaching will be used to modify programs of teacher education but that adequate documentation of such modifications will not exist. This is true because, in the Commission's role as a regulatory agency, procedures which require paperwork have been developed. Programs of teacher education within California develop PARDs, Program Approval Review Documents, in accordance with guidelines developed and adopted by the Commission, which are reviewed by Commission staff and eventually accepted by the Commission, with program approval granted for a specified period of time. The teacher education institutions then implement these programs, as described within the PARDs, and are subject to a system of external assessment to determine the extent to which programs as implemented match programs as described within PARDs and approved by the Commission. Teacher education programs do have the option of officially modifying their approved programs, although the process involves time and energy to submit the necessary paperwork, monitor the flow of the paperwork through the Commission office, and obtain approval of the Commission for the program modification. While there is little documented information about the extent to which institutions do actually utilize the program modification process, it can be anticipated that such a process will not be used in instances when the modifications are viewed as minor adjustments, but will be used shortly before an institutional program is subject to the external assessment process. The documents generated within the program modification system represent the only central source of information currently available about the extent to which results of research on teaching have been used to modify programs of teacher education within the State but also represent

an inadequate source of such information. In some instances, persons involved in teacher education programs have indicated that they are using, or intend to, the results of BTES to modify their programs but they do not intend to provide the Commission with the paperwork necessary to modify their programs.

Advice Concerning Implication

The Commission is receiving advice from a number of sources relative to the implications of the research for teacher education and certification.

There is disagreement about the extent to which the researchers involved in conducting the research are responsible for providing an assessment of the implications of the research results for teacher education and teacher certification, with individuals taking relatively strong positions on either side of the issue. Those arguing for the researchers to develop implications indicate that researchers do have some knowledge of teacher education and are most knowledgeable about and involved in the actual data and results of the research. On the other hand, those arguing against such development of implications point out that the researchers are perhaps too close to their data and implications, are aware of only some portions of the total complex of teacher education and teacher certification, and will represent only one perspective in stating the implications of the research for teacher education and certification. Any statements of implications by the researchers may carry special weight in the field of teacher education and certification because of an assignment to the researchers of special knowledge about research information.

Throughout the course of the research effort the Commission has used the advice and counsel of a Research Advisory Board, including school district personnel, teacher educators, subject matter specialists, and researchers. The work of the Advisory Board has been structured to provide a variety of perspectives and potentially conflicting advice, rather than attempting to reach consensus recommendations. Members of the Advisory Board have been involved in activities designed to illicit their ideas and opinions relative to the implications of the research for teacher education and certification. Individual and groups of Board members have developed statements of implications of the research, statements ranging from the relatively specific to the very general.

A number of other procedures have been considered by the Commission for developing statements of implications of the research for teacher education and certification. For example, the Commission has considered contracting with an agency to review all of the research information and identify implications for teacher certification and education. Another alternative under consideration is the convening of a symposium on the implications of the research for teacher education and certification.

Summary

The involvement of the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, the agency responsible for teacher certification in California, in a major research effort, the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, has had a number of effects upon the work of the Commission and upon the persons subject to the regulations of the Commission. These include changes in the conceptions of teaching and teacher education

of some Commissioners, use of the knowledge from the research by individual Commissioners, and a greater interest in research and evaluation as ways of obtaining information to be considered in the making of policy. Some teacher educators have become more aware of research on teaching, in considering whether the Commission should be involved in research and how such research might appropriately be used to inform policy. Teacher educators have also used selected findings from the Study to support particular positions relative to policy alternatives.

Several procedures are being considered to identify implications of the research for teacher education and certification. As these activities are completed, it can be anticipated that greater use will be made by the Commission, and by teacher education institutions, of the results of the research effort in decision-making relative to the education and certification of teachers.

Footnotes

1. Further information about the research is available from the author.

2. Agenda materials for Commission meetings indicate the breadth of any policy concern.

3. Inglis, S. A., (9174). "Oh, Why the Ryan Act?", California Journal of Teacher Education, Vol. II, No. 2, (October).

4. Powell, M., (1977). "Changing Conceptions of Teaching", California Journal of Teacher Education, Vol II, No. 2, (June).

5. Emick, J. A. and Peterson, S. M., (1978). A Synthesis of Findings Across Five Recent Studies of Educational Dissemination and Change, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.